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Modern Town Hall - Dialogue between modernity and tradition

I. Introduction

Dialogue between modernity and tradition is perfectly visible on the example of a Town Hall. The Town Hall, which is often having a tower, is a representative public building. Formerly was the seat of government. The history of the Town Hall dates back to ancient times, but in its current form it began to appear in the twelfth century. Localizing the building in the city center scale and monumentality testified to the power and prestige of the city. Over time the Town Hall held various positions in the life of the city. First and foremost was the seat of local government, but also had a torture chamber and prison. It was a place bustling with life, full of people. According to tradition, in the basement there was a tavern. Town Hall with market square was very prestigious place. That is why the most expensive stalls were situated around. Modern Town Hall is not only the representative seat of government, but also a symbol of a city. It is not just a settlement of administrative matters. Its importance is manifested in various areas: administration, culture, education, and entertainment. This space constitutes the central point of life, where people integrate and inspire. The Town Hall is the most important secular building in the city. For that reason, it should be encouraging to visit, so that people want to spend time there. Historically, when the Town Hall was the seat of power, there was a natural need of arriving residents to the city. Currently, Town Halls performing only representative functions lose their importance and its necessary to find them new usages. According to that, today's town halls contain more new features like restaurants, concert halls, museums, libraries, meeting places or spaces for work. Modern Town Halls are designed in view of the current needs of XXI-century users. The building, which is the pride and proof of tradition of the town should satisfy the expectations of users, visitors and employees.

II. Market squares in Poland

Polish market squares can be divided into three groups. First group consists of market squares located in large cities. They characterize with a high flow of tourists, which constitutes the drive of these locations. Almost all buildings by the square feature services concerning gastronomy or souvenir sales. Cities such as Kraków or Wrocław have beautiful, vibrant Town Halls, which act as a tourist attractions. Market squares of medium size cities face problems of dereliction and losing their appeal. With the development of shopping galleries, prestigious stores previously located in city centers, moved into the galleries, which are located on the outskirts. An example of such a city is Leszno, which for some time now shows a tendency to transfer the activity of the residents to its outskirts. The third type are small

cities or towns, for which the square still constitutes a cultural center. An example of such town is Szydłów with 1200 residents. Most services of that small town, such as store, post office, and restaurant, are located by the square. The residents strongly identify themselves with the location. The square is a place where the residents meet and talk every day.

III. Szydłów

The subject of my Master Thesis is adaptation of a commercial office building to the Town Hall of Szydłów. The idea is to move existent Municipal Office of Szydłów to adapted building, which is located in the middle of market square. However, it is disused and degraded at the moment and requires renovation. This special location needs respect to intimate character of market square, historical urban layout and local building traditions.

Szydłów, located in Świętokrzyskie Voivodeship, 54 km from its capital Kielce, due to the original preserved Gothic urban layout, and restored monuments, is a very attractive place for tourists. It gained a title of Polish Carcassonne, because of still existent parts of the medieval shale walls. On the north-west side, the line of walls is dictated by the steep wall of the ravine falling to the river. On the south-west side, walls are built on a flat ground and fortified with a mound and a moat. Described above wall arrangement is still visible today. Moreover, tourists can see the interior of the synagogue along with exhibits related to Jewish culture, ruins of the castle, courtyard, Cracow Gate, treasury with torture chamber and three churches. Residents mind local traditions. Each year, in the castle courtyard, Knight's Tournament for the sword of the king Cashmir III the Great is organized. The locals dress in old-fashioned clothes, present medieval fights, horse stunt tricks and old dance shows. The stagings, with the castle and the old walls background, create an amazing spectacle. Visiting Szydłów that day visitors may feel like in the Middle Ages so that the event brings many spectators to Szydłów. It is a tourist attraction for guests and a day of fun for the locals. Municipality of Szydłów has distinctive natural values. Szydłów has been called the "Polish capital of plum" for many years. 80% of orchards of the Szydłów municipality consist of 45 species of plums. Plums from Szydłów are used for manufacturing food, chocolate candies and alcohol. Plum cultivation is the main income of the inhabitants. Residents have access to many green recreational areas. In Szydłów, peace and idyllic atmosphere can be felt. 5 km from the town Lake Chańcza, attractive holiday destination, is located. Residents define the level of security as high. At present, Municipal Office, pharmacy, bank, dental office, post office, police office, social welfare center, nursing and rehabilitation center, multi-purpose shop, bakery, restaurant, kindergarten and school with library run in Szydłów. On Sundays, at the church square, a traditional market is held. However, there is a shortage of services. It is recommended to design new places for service premises.

One of the major drawbacks of Szydłów is the Town Hall, which does not correspond with historical surroundings. Building, called the Town Hall, dates back to the 1960s, but never served as an administrative function. Its named due to its location in the center of the market square and the fact that it was built in the place of the former XVI-century Town Hall. Currently, the edifice is deserted and needs complete renovation. Over the years deteriorating, now performs no function and repels people from the center. For that reason, partitions, floors, installations, doors and windows need to be replaced and new function must be given.

IV. Levels of correlation

One may ask whether is there any logic in saving dilapidating Town Halls and market squares. Are they still needed? Perhaps they vanish naturally? I believe they should be saved. They are a sentiment, our architectonic, historical, and cultural heritage. I believe we should not cut ourselves off from our roots. Father Janusz Bąk said: "A nation which separates itself from its roots and brings up the young generations without any respect for history, condemns itself to death." Although, this quote does not refer directly to architecture, I believe that it is very apt in terms of this subject. In order to pull the squares and Town Halls out of regress it is needed to analyze the levels of correlation and the relations among them. It has to be considered whether all correlations are equally important. Perhaps some are more important than others? It is worth considering which of them have the strongest impact on saving the contemporary market squares.

Correlation between the old and new (past and future) – the history of a market square understood as a center, as the main location in a city, reaches as far back as the ancient times. The agora in ancient Greece and the forum of Roman cities may be interpreted as the first ever squares. Both served social, public, and trade purposes. They were the place of judgement, and public meetings. Medieval market squares were most often a trading place, while during the Renaissance they served the role of a representative square. Up to the modern times, market squares served the role of the main square in the city. Unfortunately, problems in terms of the loss of appeal and dereliction, more and more often become an issue of squares in medium size cities. Market squares are currently not interesting neither for designers nor investors. Many of these squares, even those redesigned in recent years, seem to be unsuitable for contemporary behavior patterns and needs of the users. One has to consider, how to make them currently attractive and follow the zeitgeist. Perhaps elements of ethereal or interactive architecture should be implemented in order to make this particularly important space, more attractive? Contemporary elements, enrich the space of an old city. A correctly designed market square ensures a continuity of the contemporary cultural and historical situation. A well designed market square decides about the unique character of the square, about its genius loci. One has to respect the historical heritage, the proportions, the size of the square, but adjust them to the contemporary times. Old, preserved elements of the minor architecture, such as wells or whipping posts, may constitute a tourist attraction, be a memoir of the past, a pleasant memory, an association with childhood.

Correlation between users – residents, tourists, employees - one has to ask a question, should their paths meet? Will this result in an interaction, a connection between the users, or is it going to introduce a not needed chaos? If tourists are desirable in Szydłów, how to attract them to the Town Hall? What functions are needed?. Correlation between users means also introducing people with disabilities, to the society, encouraging them to take part in the activity. One has to remember about designing spaces accessible for all users – without barriers or exclusions. Age, education, or gender also impact how the square is perceived. A correctly designed market square is attractive both for a child and an adult, for women and men. One of the more serious problems in terms of redesigning modern squares is forgetting about the needs of the user. Designers do not listen to the residents, and the solutions

proposed by them, are often abstract. Conscious designing, as well as understanding users and their needs, is crucial.

Correlation between human needs – architecture is created in order to fulfill various human needs. Being created for people it adjusts to them with its scale. A human being, creating architecture, decides about its size and form, makes establishing contact with other people easier or more difficult. The proposed functions attract or repel a potential user of a market square. Following the thoughts of Le Corbusier and Kahn, architecture should not refer only to aesthetics, but most importantly to human needs. The need of a sense of connection with the space, a sense of security and shelter, are all necessary. The project is designed to meet the needs of users such as the sense of belonging, integration, inspiration and the desire to discover new things.

Correlation between human feelings and emotions – the space of a market square, similarly to other spaces, evokes emotions and impacts the well-being of its users. The coexistence of human feelings and emotions is indirectly connected with the correlation of human needs. A person rating a space as clear, friendly, and interesting, will be coming back to it. If a person feels alien in a given space, he/she won't be spending time there. A well designed market square invigorates the user's perception of the surroundings, and activates the user's memories and imagination. The goal of some market squares is to create a sense of a pause, to slow down the tempo. Serenity and an idyllic character have an impact on identifying the market square as a place of leisure, which is an answer to the overload of every-day reality. In my opinion, a market square should stand out with its balance between a place for work, leisure, and meetings. Market square of Szydłów with its Town Hall has a tremendous potential to create such an atmosphere.

Correlation between the square with the rest of the city – when designing, it is necessary to analyze the context, spatial relations and dialogue with the surroundings. The existing buildings force a scale which has to be respected. The aim of the project is to modernize existent building respecting the surroundings, building tradition and small-town character of Szydłów at the same time. Elegant, toned architecture underline official character of the Municipal Office located in the Town Hall. Entrance is highlighted by a monumental, brick frame, which plays the role of vestibule on the ground floor and balconies on the uppers. Lookout tower with a traditional steeple is a bow to historical versions of Town Halls. Another aspect is, when in the past city halls constituted the office of city authorities, there has been a natural need for the residents to come to the center of the city. Currently, city halls which have only a representative role, lose their meaning. Modern Town Hall should be a place of integration, education and entertainment of users. For that reason additional functions are desirable. It can be a library with space for computers, an exhibition area, viewpoint or cafe with a stage for organizing recitals. Additional functions will revive the administrative role of the Town Hall. Edifice should not be understood only as the seat of the authorities, but a place attractive and open for everybody. Consequently, the building will be "alive" after the hours of operation of the Municipal Office (after 15.30). All functions can work together. Organizing parties in a cafe after getting married in the Office of Civil Status or going for a

coffee during business meeting may enrich efficient action of the building. The place will be visited not only by the office's applicants, but also by tourists and locals.

Correlation between spontaneous behaviors and thought through, planned actions – in the winter time, squares offer skating rinks, fairs or holiday illuminations, while during the summer they attract people with open concerts, carnivals, and Venetian gardens. One can also come across spontaneous artists, mimes, singers, musicians. This seems however not enough. In my opinion, only thought through actions constitute a base from which one should start. Spontaneous behaviors (such as the mentioned above) constitute an enhancement in terms of viewing the market square as attractive. I understand the base as finding a new, leading function which will make the square attractive, and which is going to encourage people to return to the center of the town more. The key for success is to create harmony between the variability and the constancy of actions.

Correlation between beauty and functions – Jan Kaplicky said, "Beauty is a real problem for many architects". Why it is so hard to talk about the beauty of architecture? Is that connected with a proverb "there's no accounting for taste"? Or is it because of the multidimensionality of architecture? After all, architecture is not only about the beauty but also about form, function and structure. Writing about the beauty of the building, we should start from defining the word "beauty". Referring to a Polish language dictionary, beauty is a set of characteristics that makes us like something. Beautiful means having beauty of shapes, colors, sounds, and also full of moral value. There is also a theory that what is proportional to the human scale is beautiful (the famous Le Corbusier's Modulor). The question is how to create a building and space that is liked by everybody. First thing that might be important is cohesion and diversity. Most market squares are completely paved, lacking any green areas and functions. Those areas are not inviting, neither residents nor tourists. One has to ask a question, what functions should surround the market square? What services should be placed in the Town Hall? An employee of the Municipal Office located by the square, visits a grocery store in the morning, eats lunch at a nearby restaurant, and after work looks for a new sweater in one of the local store. And the square is once vibrant with life. Tourist that visits Szydłów spends time relaxing on bench. Meanwhile sightseeing he/she rests in café located in basement of the Town Hall or admire the view of the whole Szydłów from the lookout tower. Children play with the fountain and eat ice creams. The proportions and variety of the proposed offer of services are important. The question is how to make those elements coherent?

The building is characterized by simple form and minimalistic interiors. However, simply does not mean easily. Minimalism brings out mistakes, both design and execution. Minimalist interiors are beautiful only at the moment when each detail is well-thought. Minimalism in architecture is rich in contrasts. The building is modern, but timeless, simple, but not poor, elegant, but very functional, raw, but warm and cozy at the same time, not unobtrusive, but not indifferent in reception.

Albert Einstein once said, "The most beautiful thing we can discover is a mystery". The secrecy in architecture can be created by light. In project, correlation between beauty and function is perfectly visible on inward play of light. The light infiltrates through glass lookout

tower, then passes through two glass ceilings to finally get to interior at different angles. Second floor atrium allows penetration of sun and creation of shadow. Light for office spaces is provided through traditional windows.

Correlation between foot and vehicle traffic – if the square is supposed to attract tourists, residents and investors, easy access to center of Szydłów is important. Place for parking cars is needed however, it should not disturb pedestrians. Existent parking spaces are located around the market square. There are too many of them and they are separated by bars in an irregular manner. In the event of Szydłów, circulatory communication on the market square should be minimized. Parking area can be created in a short distance from the square. Designers should rather pay attention to pedestrians and how to create bustling with life public space.

Correlation between awareness of the designer, resident, and the head of the city – building owners, renters, and the city often have different businesses, which sometimes are difficult to coexist. So what to do for the business to be correlated? Who should be the market development coordinator? The town owns the market square and a number of buildings. It seems to be logical that the town should be the coordinator of these actions. The town has trained officials, owns administrative tools, and possesses financial resources. It is easiest for the town to acquire funds from the EU, and it may also include the resources needed for the development of the square, in its budget. An attractive market square will surely constitute a greeting card for the Szydłów, and a proper location to celebrate religious and patriotic events. It is needed to reinstate the condition in which the owner is interested in the good image of the owned property, and has the financial means to make it possible. It is also needed to discard pathological elements from the square space. It is important for misbehaving people not to bother other users of the square.

V. Summary

Presented levels of correlation constitute an attempt at indicating the many relations between the architecture, the user, and the town. In order to save market squares and Town Halls, it is needed to deeply analyze the problems within the indicated levels of correlations. It is not easy to redesign neither Town Halls nor market squares. The art of revitalization requires a dialogue between modernity and tradition. To achieve that designer needs versatile knowledge, experience and awareness of user's needs. Currently, the situation is often that the city commissions redesigning the square to a designer unfamiliar with the city. The designer orders to change the pavement, introduces new benches, a few trees... and then comes the disappointment. It turns out that the attempt to revitalize the city center has been unsuccessful. Why are the attempts to revitalize Polish market not successful? Are the changes too small? Or is it not taking into consideration the needs of the residents? That is why a drastic change in the way of thinking is required. A new idea, reinventing the wheel, which will revolutionize the manner of looking at market squares. It is necessary to differentiate the spaces in terms of functions as well as visual appearance, which will once again be interesting for users, and encourage them to visit the attractive location.

Referring to my Master Thesis the new Town Hall in Szydłów is modern, functional and suits to medieval character surroundings. The idea is to create representative, multifunctional, safe space, attractive for different age users. Main, administrative function is enriched by adding exhibition area, cafe, lookout tower and library. Project includes rebuilding existing object and master plan of market square of Szydłów. The Master Thesis is an attempt to rescue dilapidated building. Technical condition of the edifice is right, so demolition would have been an error. Difficulty of the project was to locate modern needs into existent walls. The new Town Hall is adapted to XXI century requirements by adding modern accents. New building is entirely adapted for disabled people. In conclusion, degraded building is rescued. Szydłów obtained new, attractive market square with the Town Hall, which beyond administrative function is a tourist attraction and a meeting place. Existent structure provides many design capabilities what I attempted to show in my Master Thesis.

To sum up, Louis Khan once said that an architect has the possibility to create life. A building is the image of a human being, because it forms a whole while being constituted of parts. The market place along with the Town Hall, constitute the heart of the town. It is necessary to find designers and investors, who, thanks to their correlated actions, will once again reinstate a strong beat to that urban heart. It is no coincident that we talk about the “beat of life”. The presence of people in the market square keeps the town alive. That is why it is necessary to attract users to the center, and to create a connection among them, for the heart to beat as long as possible.

Keywords: Szydłów, Town Hall, Municipal Office, market square, adaptation



pict.1. current view of market square of Szydłów

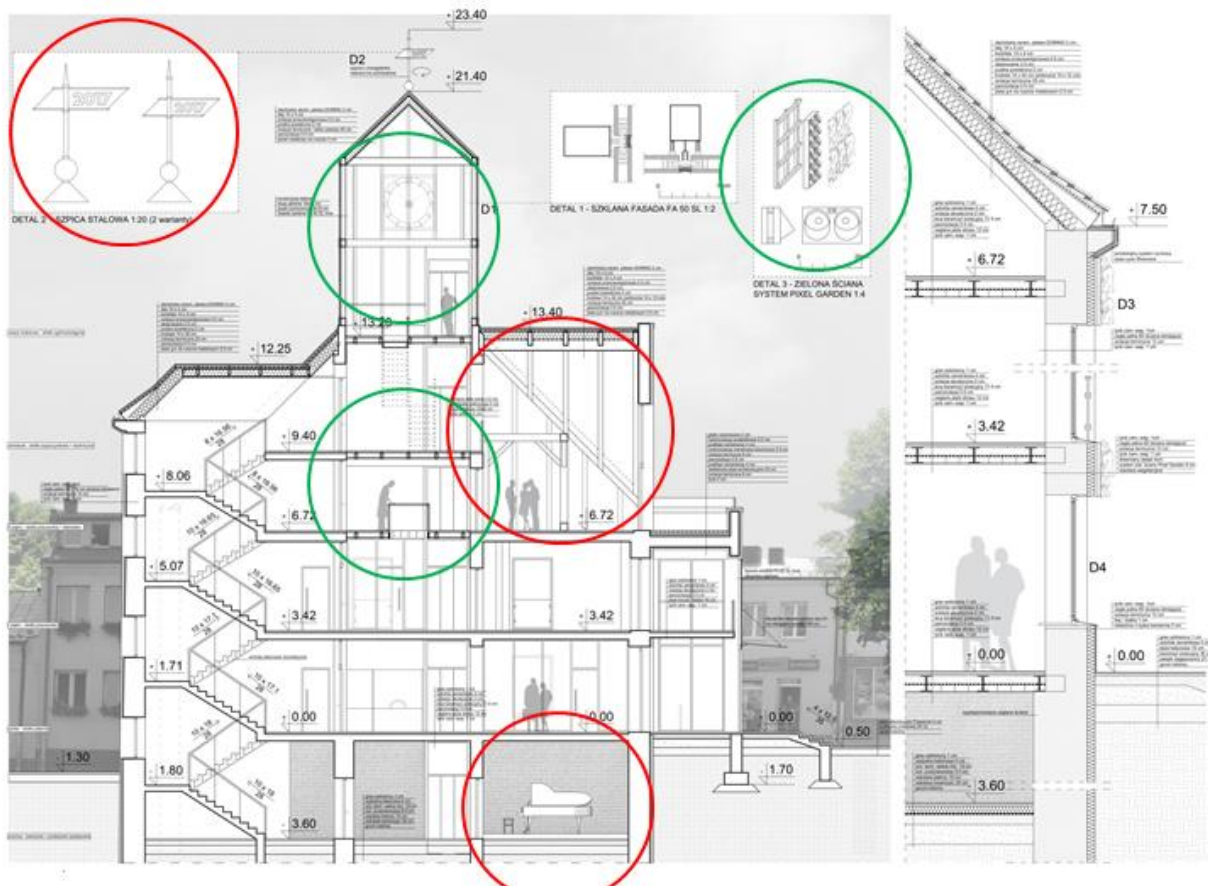


pict.2. MA thesis by Agnieszka Adamska, Master Plan od Szydłów

PROJEKT MAGISTERSKI AUTOR: INŻ. ARCH. AGNIESZKA ADAMSKA PROMOTOR: DR INŻ. ARCH. JAN ZAMASZ
POLITECHNIKA WROCŁAWSKA WYDZIAŁ ARCHITEKTURY ROK AKADEMICKI 2015/2016



pict.3. MA thesis by Agnieszka Adamska, new Town Hall



pict.4. MA thesis by Agnieszka Adamska, section



pict.5. MA thesis by Agnieszka Adamska, elevations

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Abstract

Dialogue between modernity and tradition is perfectly visible on the example of a Town Hall. The modern Town Hall is not only the representative seat of government, but also a symbol of the city. It is not just a settlement of administrative matters. Its importance is manifested in various areas: administration, culture, education and entertainment. The Town Hall is the most important secular building in the city. For that reason, market square should be encouraging to visit, so that people want to spend time there. Formerly, when the Town Hall was the seat of power, there was a natural need of arriving residents to the city. Currently, Town Halls performing only representative functions lose their importance and its necessary to find them new usages.

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